

Morse Building
1025-1031 2nd Street
Sacramento
Sacramento Co.
California

HABS No. CAL-1259

HABS,
CAL,
34-SAC,
46-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20243

HABS
CAL
34-SAC
46-

THE MORSE BUILDING

Sacramento, Sacramento County, California

Address: 1025-1031 Second Street (NE Corner)
between "J" and "K" Streets
Occupant: Unoccupied
Use: Stores, Cafe, and Bar on First Floor;
Offices on Second Floor

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Dr. John Frederick Morse, a New Yorker, was one of Sacramento's pioneer doctors, having arrived there in 1849 and remaining a leading citizen and businessman of that city until his establishing practice in San Francisco in the 1860's. His first connection with the so-called Morse Building is referenced on page 96 of the 1863-64 Sacramento Directory wherein both his office and residence are given as the "Northeast corner of "K" and Second Streets." Several earlier buildings had occupied the site, the existing structure being a composite of a first-floor structure dating from 1853, after the fire of November 1852; and a second floor apparently added after the street was raised in 1863-64 due to the floods of 1861-62. Earlier structures included the Post Office and St. Charles Hotel which were destroyed in the fire of 1852.

In 1849, Dr. Morse operated a hospital in association with Dr. J. O. B. Stillman at 3rd and "K" Streets and was one of the doctors working heroically during the cholera epidemic of 1850. He entered early in the business affairs of the town and is listed in the Sacramento Director for 1850 as a "real estate agent" at 35 "K" Street.

From March of 1851 until May of 1852, Morse served as first Editor of the Sacramento Union. In 1853, he wrote the first detailed "HISTORY OF SACRAMENTO" which appeared in the Sacramento Directory of that year and has become a standard reference for those interested in researching the first years of the city's existence -- 1849-53.

On October 8, 1852, Dr. Morse was the principal speaker on a program opening California's first State Fair held in Sacramento.

The great fire of November 2, 1852, destroyed all of the property belonging to the realtor, Dr. W. M. Carpenter, between "K" Street and the alley on the east side of Second Street. His holdings had included the U. S. Post Office, St. Charles Hotel, restaurant, drug store, and various professional offices on the second floor as depicted in a wood-cut of the building's exterior appearing in the September 1, 1852, issue of the SACRAMENTO STEAMER UNION. After the fire, Carpenter's property was bought by Dr. Morse, together with two partners, Thompson and Dr. F. W. Hatch.

From 1853 to 1855, Dr. Morse had his office on the second floor over the Stanford Brothers Store, 56 "K" Street. He maintained a life-long friendship with Leland Stanford and was one of the early supporters of the proposed Central Pacific Railroad, being one of the first stockholders and later a member of the Board of Directors

JOHN F. MORSE, M. D., PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON,

Office, 56 K street, up Stairs,

SACRAMENTO. *Directory 1853*

From 1855 to 1862, Morse maintained both office and residence in the Clarendon House on the NW corner of Second and "L" Streets where he is listed in the Directory as being married with two children.

Dr. Morse is last listed as a Sacramento resident in the Directory for 1863 wherein his office and residence are given for the first and only time "on the NE corner of "K" and Second Streets"; the site of the existing so-called Morse Building. Morse's residency there must have been of short duration, as in that same year (1863) he left Sacramento for San Francisco to become associated with the medical department of the College of the Pacific.

The building of our concern was never called the "Morse Building" until recent years. Just who built it, and when, remains to be documented. Morse and his partners (Thompson and Hatch) may have built the first floor portion in late 1853 or early 1854. The second floor was obviously not added until after the streets were raised -- probably in 1865, two years after Morse had left Sacramento. In 1859, the property was assessed at \$89,000 with an additional \$600 for improvements which certainly would not have covered a two-story building.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Certain assumptions may logically be made as to the date or dates of various phases of construction by comparing the existing structure with similar structures of its type and having similar architectural details. The arched openings of the first floor, separated by ornamental cast-iron pilasters, indicate that in all probability the building was originally one story, the arches and pilasters being identical to those of the Diana Saloon, 205-7 "J" Street, the first floor of the Howard House, 109-111 "K" Street, and the first floor of the Our House Saloon, 926 Second Street. All three of these latter examples were known to have been built in late 1853 or early 1854 after the November fire of 1852; and the pilasters of all four buildings were cast by the Sacramento Iron Works, established in September of 1853. The upper floors of the Howard House were added in 1865.

After the flood of 1861-62, all of the streets from Front to Seventh were raised to a new level, averaging six to eight feet; and all buildings were either raised to the new street grades, rebuilt, or, where the street facade employed cast-iron pilasters, they were reassembled at the new grades; and, in many cases, a second floor was added. This was the case at the Bank Exchange, 1030 Second Street, the Rialto Building, 228-230 "J" Street, and the Apollo Building, 228-230 "K" Street, all of which structures occupy corner sites similar to the Morse Building, the first floors dating from 1853 and the second floors from 1865.

In the absence of documentary evidence to the contrary, it is assumed that the eight remaining cast-iron pilasters are original to the 1853-4 structure which had 20 such pilasters, assuming that they repeated on the "K" Street facade and that the second floor dates from the raising of the streets, circa 1865.

The double-window, second-floor fenestration crowned by flat-arched trim is an almost unique window arrangement in Old Sacramento, the only other somewhat similar arrangement being one pair of second-floor windows on the second floors of the Bank Exchange on the NW corner of "K" and Second Streets. The arched, moulded trim is typical of the "Italianate" style so prevalent in the 1860's.

Whatever other architectural embellishments, cornice, etc., may have graced the exterior have long since disappeared, and the partition arrangements of both first and second floors have undergone so many alterations as to leave no clue as to what the original plan arrangements may have been.

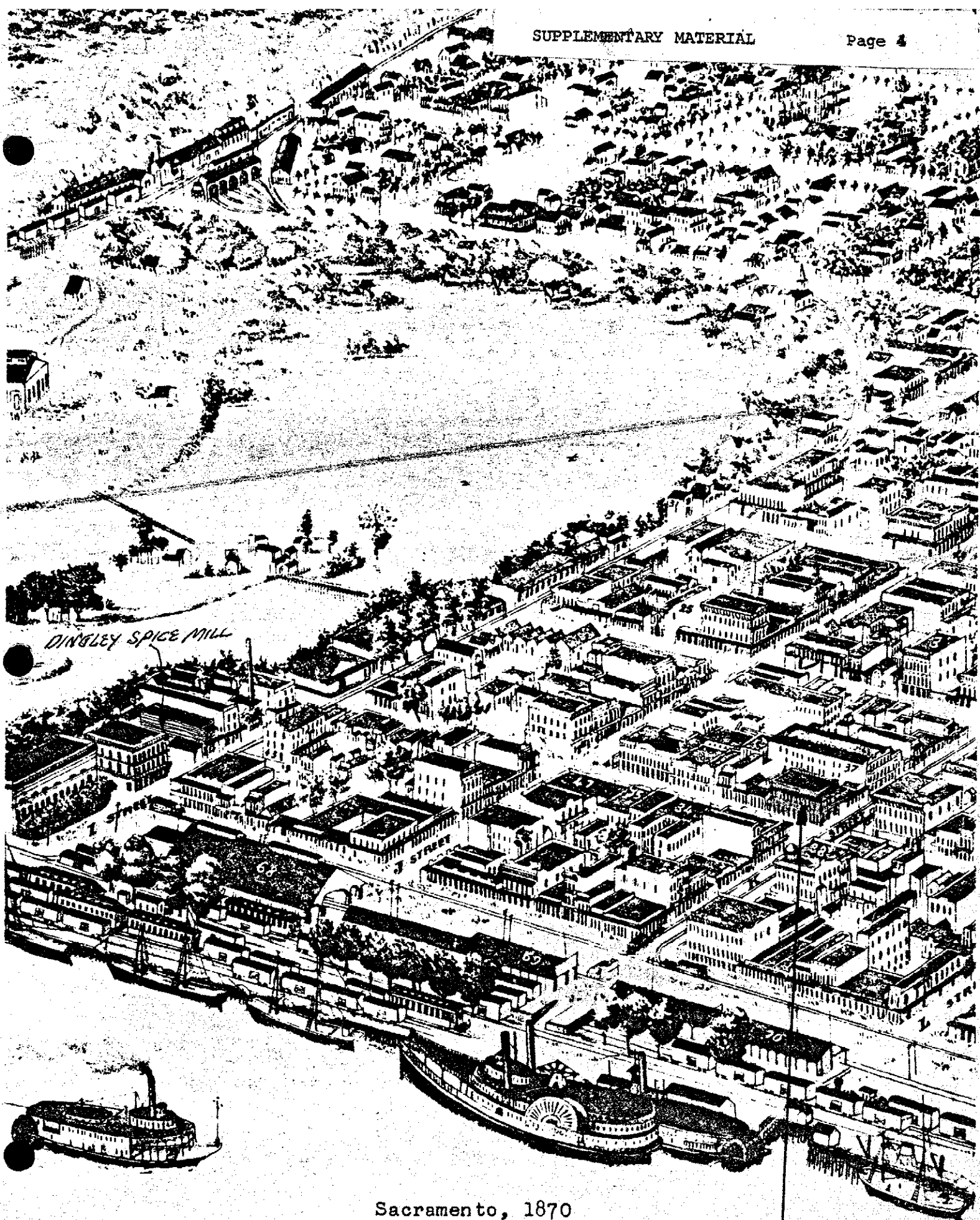
REFERENCES:

1. Sacramento Steamer Union, September 1, 1852
2. Sacramento Directories 1850-1863
3. Sacramento Guide Book (Bee 1939)

Prepared by

Clyde F. Trudell, Architect

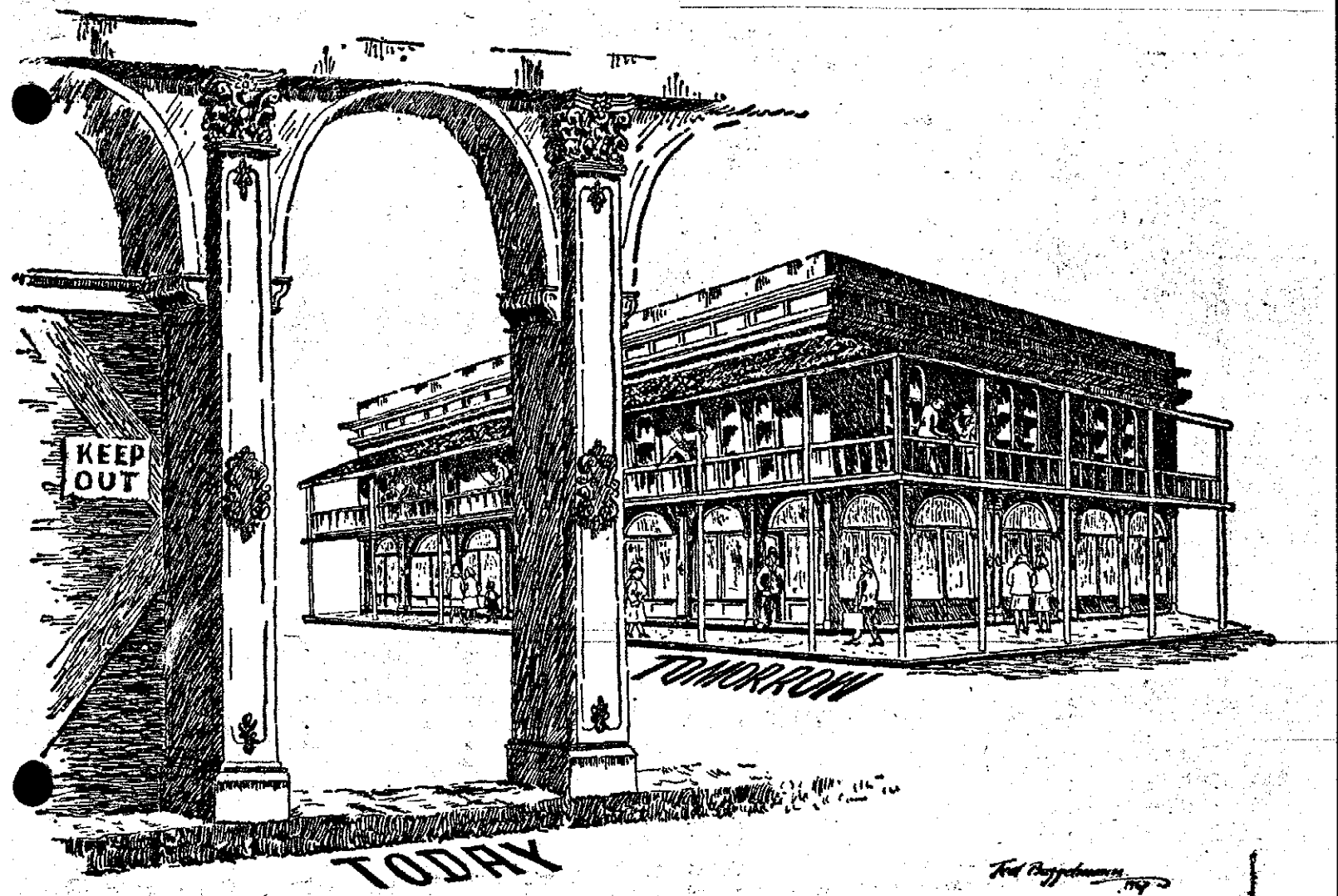
April 1969



DINGLEY SPICE MILL

Sacramento, 1870

MORSE
BUILDING



Pilot Model in Old Sacramento Project

Sketch shows Morse Building as it appears today, with boarded-up exterior and two of 20 ornate cast iron pilasters; also, the building as it will appear when restored, with graceful window arches and canopied balcony.



THE MORSE BUILDING

The Morse Building carries the name of Dr. John Frederick Morse, one of the driving forces in the Sacramento community from his arrival in the Sacramento area in 1849 until his departure for San Francisco in 1863. He held many public offices and became an ardent promoter of the Central Pacific Railroad and one of its first stockholders and directors.

The Morse Building, located at 2nd and K Streets, is the first building selected by the agency for restoration in the Old Sacramento area. The Morse Building, despite many alterations over the past hundred years, has fortunately retained some of its original architectural features. This restoration is one of the first historic demonstration projects in the country to be supported by Federal Urban Renewal funds and will be used as a pilot project.

Authentic materials will be used in the restoration. Twenty ornate cast iron pilasters were on the building originally. Eight of them still exist. The twelve more required have been extensively researched by the Knight Foundry in Sutter Creek. The foundry, in association with the architects, determined how the pilasters could be cast in iron as they were 100 years ago. The old doorways and gracefully arched window frames, as well as the exterior wood balconies and canopy, were researched with the aid of the Capital City Planing Mill of Sacramento. The exterior plaster drawn moldings and the granite sill base will be re-created as they existed on the original Morse Building. Even the sidewalks will be recreated of wood planks.

It is anticipated that restoration of the Morse Building will be completed in the Spring of 1969. It will then be offered for sale. The Morse Building restoration is expected to stimulate private capital to restore and rebuild other sites within the Old Sacramento project. This will be of great historic and economic value to Sacramento.